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Induction & Mentoring – Increasing Beginning Teacher Retention & Effectiveness

URI/RIC Joint PhD Program

*Abstract:*

Beginning teacher attrition is a well-documented problem in American education. In an effort to understand this problem studies have been done to attempt to isolate the cause of attrition. Even before the results of the studies were published; states, school districts, teachers unions and schools of education had instituted programs of induction and mentoring in an effort to keep beginning teachers in the classroom. Induction programs vary from state to state and even school district to school district. Beginning teacher induction, at this point in time, is a fractured landscape of different programs and philosophies.

*Introduction to Induction & Mentoring:*

Headlines on education often include the idea that American schools are facing a teaching shortage. This shortage is not due entirely to a lack of qualified teachers but also due to high teacher turnover, particularly in the early years of a teacher’s career (Darling-Hammond, 2003). National programs, such as Teach for America, and local programs, such as the Rhode Island Teaching Fellows, have sprung up to combat the problem of teacher attrition by providing an additional source of teachers. According to the work of Richard Ingersoll, approximately one third of beginning teachers leave within their first three years and almost half leave by the end of their fifth year (Ingersoll, 2001). These losses in the early years have been attributed to a variety of circumstances.

Literature on beginning teacher retention appears to have taken on the problem from one of three approaches. First are characteristics within the individual teacher which predispose them to leaving the teaching profession. Much of the literature in this area cites the work of Richard Ingersoll as its source and relies on the Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The next approach to the study of new teacher retention looks at problems within the schools which set up unfavorable conditions for new teachers and cause them to leave. The last approach has been to look at new teacher induction programs as a way to retain and improve beginning teachers.

Research abounds in the area of beginning teacher retention. According to Richard Ingersoll’s 2004 study “29% of beginning teachers left teaching or changed jobs at the end of their first year. (Smith, 2004)” Retention rates for beginning teachers remain dismal through the fifth year; at this point 50% of beginning teachers have left the field (Smith, 2004). In an effort to staunch the hemorrhage of beginning teachers induction programs have been developed, adopted and implemented. Rates of participation in induction programs have risen steadily over the past 20 years. In 1990 51% of public school teachers participated in some form of induction, by 1999 that number had risen to 83% (Smith, 2004).

In an effort to staunch the hemorrhage of beginning teachers leaving the field most school systems have instituted some form of induction program. Eighty percent of beginning teachers are now exposed to some permutation of induction (Ingersoll, 2001, 2004). In her 2007 study Sara Fry followed four beginning teachers through their first year. Each participant was exposed to different induction protocols, all of which had their ups and downs. Type of induction and support is correlated to district wealth (Johnson, 2003). Beginning teachers in wealthier districts received more support and mentoring than those in low income districts. Types induction provided vary as well. Induction programs can consist of only mentoring or only seminars but often include some combination of both.

Induction programs, in general, have four goals. Firstly, they exist to improve learning and teaching for students. The early years of a teacher’s career are not their most effective. Secondly, induction programs exist to increase retention of beginning teachers. Thirdly, the opportunity to mentor, to he held up by the school as an example of a good teacher, can invigorate and revitalize experienced teachers. Lastly, induction programs exist to increase professional efficacy (Moore, 2008).

Induction activities can be categorized in several different ways. One method of categorizing induction activities is to classify them as high intensity or low intensity. High intensity activities require substantial funding, planning and effort on the part of the school or district employing these activities. Examples of high intensity activities include beginning teacher seminars and participation in educational conferences. They are associated with greater beginning teacher effectiveness but not with higher levels of beginning teacher retention. Low intensity activities require substantially less funding, planning and effort on the part of the school or district employing them. They are associated with greater beginning teacher retention but not with greater effectiveness (Moore, 2008). Mentoring is an example of a low intensity activity.

In addition to school district sponsored induction programs, the problem of beginning teacher retention has been noticed and taken on by higher education institutions (Davis, 2006; Sanderson, 2003). A partnership has arisen between Texas State University and the surrounding school districts which has significantly increased the beginning teacher retention for the school districts. The TFP is a partnership program between Texas State University and several school districts within an 80 mile radius. Results of this partnership have increased beginning teacher retention; participants have a retention rate of 83% (Davis, 2006). Additionally, this program appears to limit the number of teachers who teach for a time and then go off into some field within the education system, administration or guidance for example (Davis, 2006).

Induction programs have an added benefit for districts in that beginning teachers tend to revert back to lower forms of teaching, like lecture, early in their careers when other methods fail to produce desired results or produce undesirable student behaviors (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Lower forms of teaching include, but are not limited to, lecture and silent, independent busy work. Both of which have their place at in instruction but should not be used as the sole instructional methodology. Well matched mentor mentee relationships can combat this instinct in beginning teachers (Kardos, 2001).

The most frequently encountered form of induction is mentoring (Ingersoll, 2004). Mentoring, at its most basic definition is the partnering of a beginning teacher with an experienced teacher. Mentors can serve different roles, they can help to form the new teacher or they can serve as a resource for integration into the school community. A broad spectrum exists in education when it comes to mentoring programs. These programs “may differ according to the degree of formality of the mentoring relationship, the selection and training of mentors, the amount of release time a mentor is given, the amount and nature of the support mentors give teachers, and the appropriateness of match between mentor and mentee. (Fletcher, 2009)”

*Objective of this Study:*

Many studies have been done on induction and mentoring over the past 10 years. The current state of induction in America, fractured, has had one great benefit; it has provided fodder for researchers. Without intentionally doing so, the patchwork quilt of induction methodologies and philosophies that has formed in America has given the research community the opportunity to study the efficacy of the multitude of programs that have come into existence.

This study will seek to answer the following questions. First, what types of induction and mentoring exist? Which induction and mentoring programs are most effective in the areas of teacher effectiveness and attrition? This data will be used to create an framework for a research based induction and mentoring policy that could be implemented by a state or school district in order to increase beginning teacher effectiveness and decrease beginning teacher attrition.

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